

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

CARLOS A. SÁNCHEZ, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITOR

Carlos A. Sánchez
SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

The present issue of the newsletter contains three articles, a conference report, and a syllabus. The first article, by Grant J. Silva, urges us to fearlessly speak our truths, not in spite of, but because of our status as racialized bodies. Silva implores us to be ourselves in professional philosophy, especially, he says, "if you are a racial or ethnic minority." His intended audience, he tells us, are both those that believe in the importance of their own social-existential circumstance, and also those "who hold that one's race or ethnic identity is completely irrelevant or out of place in philosophy; it is aimed at those who would devalue the epistemic importance of race, ethnicity, or gender." The underlying question that motivates the article is *What does philosophy have to do with you, or, perhaps more precisely, what do you have to do with philosophy?*

The second article, by José-Antonio Orosco, makes a valuable connection between Mexican existentialism and Chicana philosophy. Orosco argues that "Mexican thinkers . . . provided Chicana philosophers with a sense of continuity between Mexican and Chicana worldviews." The paper focuses on the work of Elihu Carranza who, in the early 1970s, "sought to develop an original Chicana existentialism that could help construct a unique cultural identity, and recover ethical values, for Mexican Americans in the United States." According to Orosco, Carranza "maintains that Chicana identity takes up existential responsibility for itself in a way that eludes the twentieth-century Mexican philosophers in their quest for *lo Mexicano*." Toward this end, Carranza introduces us to the concept of "*carnalismo*." An important aspect of Carranza's work is that, when all is said and done, Chicana existentialism challenges "the foundations of white supremacy in the United States," in this way being truly in line with other Chicana liberatory movements.

And the third article, by Shoni Ranher, argues for a reconsideration of Kierkegaard in our readings of the Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla. First, Ranher defends Jorge Portilla's negative appraisal of "*relajo*," or the "suspension of seriousness," over and against Carlos A. Sánchez's (2012) positive appraisal of the phenomenon. In its most injurious form, *relajo* presents itself as a threat to human freedom and socio-political change, since it disrupts and interrupts progress. Portilla argues that Socratic irony is *relajo*'s antidote. By contrast, Sánchez finds in *relajo* an attitude of resistance and an alternative means to liberatory

struggles against oppressive power structures, a claim he supports by finding Portilla's view misguided by his inheriting an oppressive, Western prejudice, pointing back to Socrates, that thinking well requires thinking seriously. Ranher counters by appealing to Kierkegaard's account of Socratic humor as an alternative to Sánchez's reading of Socratic seriousness as "colonial seriousness."

The newsletter also includes a conference report. Latinx, Chicana, and Latin American/Mexican philosophy has experienced an increase in conference activity over the past year. The various APA meetings saw an increase in panels sponsored by the APA Committee on Hispanics, the Society for Mexican American Philosophy, and the Radical Philosophy Association. There was also a conference on Mexican philosophy held at the University of California, San Diego, and a conference on Latinx philosophy at Rutgers University, while the Third Biannual Conference on Mexican Philosophy in the Twentieth Century is set to take place at Mount St. Mary's University in October 2018 (see <https://www.binationalmexicanphilosophyconference.org>). The conference report included in the present newsletter summarizes the activities of one of these conferences, the Third Annual Student Philosophy Conference at Rutgers University, held this past spring.

And last, but not least, we present Manuel Vargas's syllabus for his Mexican philosophy course at the University of California, San Diego, one of only a handful of courses specifically dedicated to what some would call a "branch" of Latin American philosophy (although I would hesitate to do so). We include this syllabus here for two reasons: one, to provide a model of best practices in the teaching of Mexican philosophy and, two, to highlight the significance of such a course. That is, a course dedicated to Mexican philosophy is indeed a positive step toward the diversification in philosophy to which many of us have aspired for years and even decades; this is a sign that Latinx philosophers are becoming increasingly confident in the presence, value, and necessity of Latin American philosophy as an autonomous and important archive of human knowledge.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* is accepting contributions for the SPRING 2019 issue. Our readers are encouraged to submit original work on any topic related to Hispanic/Latino thought, broadly construed. We publish original, scholarly treatments, as well as reflections,

book reviews, and interviews. Please prepare articles for anonymous review.

All submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All articles submitted to the newsletter undergo anonymous review by members of the Committee on Hispanics.

BOOK REVIEWS

Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

DEADLINES

Deadline for spring issue is November 15. Authors should expect a decision by January 15. Deadline for the fall issue is April 15. Authors should expect a decision by June 15.

Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions electronically to the editor,

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FORMATTING GUIDELINES

The APA Newsletters adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use italics instead of underlining. Use an “em dash” (—) instead of a double hyphen (--). Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90. See Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

ARTICLES

On the Difficulties of Writing Philosophy from a Racialized Subjectivity

Grant J. Silva
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

This essay is about the loss of voice.¹ It is about the ways in which the act of writing philosophy often results in an alienating and existentially meaningless experience for many budding philosophers, particularly those who wish to think *from* their racialized and gendered identities in professional academic philosophy (and still come out

with a job or obtain tenure!). Unless one actively resists and consciously tries to keep sight of who they are while philosophizing—which means being true to one’s interests, writing on topics that they find fascinating (regardless of their disciplinary uptake), and relying upon ways of knowing informed by the particularities of human identity, to say the least—professionalized philosophy has a tendency to disembodiment its practitioners. It can, as Kurt Cobain sings, “beat me out of me.” This disembodiment is strange since most philosophy, especially since Socrates, begins under the banner of “know thy self.” How are we to understand this “self” that philosophy asks us to know, when, for many, any attempt at using *logos* to think about *ethnos* results in nonphilosophy? Ultimately, as I suggest, the act of writing philosophy often amounts to a sleight of hand, one resulting in the alienation, estrangement, and eventual replacement of one sense of self with another that may not really be you.

Contrary to this, I suggest that you be yourself in professional philosophy, especially if you are a racial or ethnic minority. Note, however, that this suggestion does not imply that one is (nor should they be) altogether defined by their gender, race, or ethnicity in terms of their ability to think. While there remains something to be said about the inability of controlling how one’s colleagues or society at large views you, that is, the inescapability of a racialized existence, to demand that all philosophers who happen to be of “minority” status think in essentialized ways that correspond with race and/or gender would be an injustice and quite the totalizing experience. Such a strong stance would deny many philosophers their status as philosopher plain and simple (not a “Black,” “Latinx,” or what-have-you philosopher). For that reason, my suggestion aims at those who hold that one’s race or ethnic identity is completely irrelevant or out of place in philosophy; it is aimed at those who would devalue the epistemic importance of race, ethnicity, or gender altogether.

In order to give shape to this line of thought, I ask the following question: What does philosophy have to do with you? Or, perhaps more precisely, what do you have to do with philosophy? Such a question routinely kick-starts my Latin American philosophy course. It is a question that students (both undergraduate and graduate) often have a hard time answering, regardless of their ethnic or racial background, sexuality, or gender. It is also one that philosophers do not ask enough (or at all for that matter). I start my course in this way because, as I see it, whatever “Latin American” or “Latinx” philosophy might be, it is part of the embodiment of philosophy, a movement (for lack of a better word) that has found new meaning in professional philosophy and is part of a process that says *who* you are matters philosophically.

To call oneself a “Latin American philosopher,” or, perhaps more specifically, to philosophize from a Latin American or Latinx standpoint, is to affirm the importance of one’s *Latinidad*—whatever that might mean—while doing philosophy. This is quite the political statement in mainstream academic philosophy. In a discipline that has for the most part been dominated by white males, both thematically and methodologically, to think from a

nonwhite or nonmale perspective grates against the grain of much professional academic philosophy. Moreover, to regard one's Latinidad as a site for knowledge-construction and/or philosophical analysis is to ascribe epistemic value to race or gender or the intersection of these (and more). How you know is impacted by *who* you are. Charles Mills puts it best when he writes that because of the centrality of whiteness to professional philosophy's self-conception, a point I explain below, those wishing to think from nonwhite perspectives are "challenging philosophy in a way that Black scholars in other areas are not challenging theirs."² Not only *should* philosophers embrace this challenge, but if philosophy is to thrive today, attract more students from a variety of backgrounds, and survive in higher education, it *must*. Problem is, many would rather sink the ship than keep it afloat.

DISEMBODIED PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

The disembodiment of philosophy comes from certain methodological constraints, metaphilosophical commitments, and normative ideals about the end goal of philosophical thought. When first introducing philosophy to students unfamiliar with it, professors and instructors oftentimes fall back upon the transliteration of the Greek work *philosophia* as the "love of wisdom." Given the meaning of the particles *philo* and *sophia*, these professors and instructors are not wrong when reducing philosophy to such an easily digestible cliché (I, too, am guilty of reaching for this formula when I am having a hard time explaining what philosophy is and what philosophers do). Nevertheless, as I argue below, to think of philosophy as merely the love of wisdom is an impoverishment and understatement. First off, most people understand being wise as synonymous with being knowledgeable, and knowledge is not necessarily the same as wisdom. I can know a great deal; that does not make me wise. Wisdom is critical insight or a disposition towards knowing/knowledge that may accompany the state of being knowledgeable, but it also might not. Socrates purported to know nothing or very little but was said to be wise. Loving wisdom does not mean a collection of facts. Second, the loving of wisdom was never meant to be an end in itself; no one loves wisdom simply for the sake of loving wisdom (that would be weird). Philosophers aspire after wisdom because it frees one from obscurantism, ignorance, dogma, falsehood, and various forms of ideology and false-consciousness that support social and political institutions (many of which happen to be unjust). Thus, there is an inherent liberatory quality to philosophy, as Ignacio Ellacuría put it (again, see below), one that extends all the way to Western academic understandings of the origins of this field.

Philosophy is also often described as the universal science of thought, a rigorous and critical examination of "how things in the broadest sense of the term hang together in the broadest sense of the term," to use the famous quote by Wilfred Sellars. Here, philosophy is the province of "big questions." While a precise definition might be untenable, most philosophers agree that their discipline asks important questions about life, death, right, wrong, good and bad, the existence of God, the nature of religious belief, the extent of human knowledge, the meaning of life, and a whole lot more. In order to ask "big questions," however, one has

to achieve sufficient discursive breadth, that is, a way of speaking, thinking, and writing that places you on the same page as the great thinkers of history, e.g., Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, and others. From this perspective, the practice of philosophy requires that we think in a way that transcends human difference, in a way that arises above the particularities of our individual or collective historical and cultural contexts such that our thoughts speak across the ages and ask questions pertaining to all of humanity, not just our individual self or subset of humanity.

The problem with such a conception of philosophy is that in being asked to write, speak, and think in a way that spans space and time, students of philosophy are often forced to downplay or drop those aspects of their selves that tend to be rather meaningful on individual (and collective) levels. Worse, since achieving the widest discursive breadth possible often comes by finding a common (read "universal") ground, budding philosophers are often forced to speak in terms articulated by those of the dominant perspective(s). This is the particular knot that I wish readers think to about: the downplaying of racial or ethnic difference and the simultaneous embracement of a supposed "race-less" disembodied voice.

In "Philosophy Raced, Philosophy Erased," Mills identifies the pervasive whiteness of professionalized philosophy as the root of this problem.³ As he explains, philosophers of color face an assortment of challenges upon entering the ranks of professional philosophy. Some of these include implicit and explicit racial/gender biases, microaggressions, double standards, forms of tokenization, and outright hostility or animosity. All of these, unfortunately, have come to be expected by racialized minorities entering academic philosophy (which does not make them right). Professional philosophers can rectify the above if the political will and various administrative and institutional support mechanisms are in place. Sadly, both tend to be lacking (but that is a different matter). The most perplexing and unique challenge faced by philosophers of color, Mills continues, is the relegation of the types of interpersonal, structural, and historical issues faced by racialized minorities to the status of "nonphilosophy." In particular, Mills has in mind issues revolving around race, but one can easily add related concepts, historical events, or phenomena such as racism, sexism, colonization, slavery, various types of objectification and denigration, political marginalization, economic exploitation (as women and/or people of color), and more.

In comparison to other fields, such as literature, sociology, or history, philosophy aspires to ask perennial questions. "Philosophy is supposed to be abstracting away from the contingent, the corporeal, the temporal, the material, to get at necessary, spiritual, eternal, ideal truth," writes Mills.⁴ From this perspective, the range of questions that fall into the domain of philosophy ought not to include those that lack broad appeal. Questions devoted to race and processes of racialization, therefore, are of limited relevance to "philosophers" on account of them being "local," particular, *too* corporeal (as it were), and mostly of interest to "minorities." It is not that white philosophers altogether lack interest in any of the above concerns. Instead, Mills's analysis centers on the way questions connected to

race or processes of racialization are considered “applied” issues, “special topics,” perhaps even “non-ideal theory,” or whatever term is used to confer peripheral, tangential, outlier-status as *not really philosophy*.

A major reason for this marginalization is the fact that the hegemonic group of individuals traditionally viewed as “philosophers” lack the range of perspective often shared by people of color. To make matters worse, this group also inhabits a position of racialized normativity. Using political philosophy as an example, Mills explains that the experiential starting point for people of color, generally speaking, runs contrary to the basic assumptions about political subjectivity maintained by many “mainstream” thinkers. He writes, “Your moral equality and personhood are certainly *not* recognized; you are *not* equal before the law; and the state is *not* seeking to protect but to encroach upon your interests in the interests of the white population.”⁵ In the context of the United States’s racial imaginary, African Americans are fundamentally viewed as criminal and dangerous; the existence of Latinx peoples is predicated on tropes of “illegality.” While the rights of Blacks, Hispanics, and even Native Americans (via treaty) might be protected nominally, these protections are not automatically granted in our society but must be continuously fought for and asserted, a point that gives new meaning to the idea of racial privilege. All this is to say, a metaphysically stable and legally secure political subjectivity is something philosophers can take for granted only when the class of individuals who make up professional philosophy are treated the same way by the law, show up in similar manners in terms of political representation, and also share the same normative concerns. Thus, when relying upon one’s (white racial) self as a frame of reference for discussion of rights or political organization, it is quite possible that, in academic contexts with other philosophers who share the same racialized starting point, the particularity of your view is obscured and the experience of “unraced” whites becomes the norm, as Mills puts it.

I offer the question of political justice as it relates to undocumented immigrants or irregular migration as another example. At the onset of *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls, arguably the most important political philosopher in the twentieth century, writes that his main object of inquiry is justice, the basic structure of society.⁶ Seeking a simple conception of justice, Rawls limits his project in two ways (one of which is important here): “I shall be satisfied if it is possible to formulate a reasonable conception of justice for the basic structure of society conceived for the time being as a closed system isolated from other societies.”⁷ In *The Law of Peoples*, he adds “this position views society as closed: persons enter only by birth, and exit only by death.”⁸ In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls continues: “That a society is closed is a considerable abstraction, justified only because it enables us to speak about certain main questions free from *distracting details*.”⁹ Besides viewing the plight of undocumented peoples in places like the United States as a “distracting detail,” Rawls’s restriction betrays his own principles by providing too much information regarding the persons behind the famed “veil of ignorance.” When formulating the basic principles upon which the structure

of society will depend, we may not know if we are rich, poor, Black, white, able-bodied or not, male or female, gay or straight, but we *do* know that everyone behind the veil will be a citizen or, at the very least, have regular status. Through this restriction Rawls limits justice, *in its most basic form*, to those who are formal members of the body politic, a move that alienates upwards of twelve million undocumented people from the basic structure of society (i.e., justice). Unless such a limitation is justifiable, which is to say that the burden is upon Rawlsians to show how this is not an arbitrary starting point for a theory of justice (again, appealing to Rawls’s own standards), how can the range of justice, *in its most basic form*, be so narrow?

My goal is not to engage the burgeoning literature on the ethics of immigration when I ask the above question—a question that many Rawlsians and political philosophers will dismiss as an instance in “non-ideal theory” (yet another means of downplaying the unique philosophical challenges posed by undocumented or irregular immigration). Instead, building upon Mills’s point, my goal is to demonstrate how many of the assumptions that “mainstream” philosophy depends upon, like taking citizenship (or, even more abstractly, “membership”) for granted when constructing a theory of justice, reflect a rather particular perspective which shapes a specific set of normative concerns. Now, imagine this happening in the aggregate, adding things like prestige, the weight of tradition, and the “need for rigor” into the mix. One can easily see how many of those intellectual endeavors that might attract and welcome more nonwhite people into philosophy—and, again, this is not to say that philosophers of color are *only* interested in “projects of color,” so to speak—are jettisoned (I am tempted to say “deported”) to ethnic studies, area studies, women and gender studies, etc.

It is important to underscore that it is not merely the numerical overrepresentation of whites that leads to the alienation of minorities in philosophy. Mills’s ultimate concern is with gate-keeping methodological constraints and “border-building” tactics that simultaneously curtail the diversification of philosophy as well as obscure *the particularity* of those concerns by passing themselves off as “universal.” Through this process, professional philosophy remains overpopulated by white people (men in particular) and dominated by white interests passing themselves off as race-less philosophical concerns. To put it differently, if philosophy is the “science of thought,” as a “science” it depends on a particular method. Such method does not come from nowhere but is produced by specific philosophers in particular places and points in time. In the context of professional academic philosophy, this means students are asked to speak, write, and think in ways that historically make sense within a methodological context articulated predominantly by dead white men.

Indeed, as one can probably realize, there is no such thing as an objective, impartial “view from nowhere,” a point that sets up quite an interesting predicament: either way one goes about it, one cannot avoid philosophizing from a *particularized* perspective; it is either yours or that of the dominant point of view passing itself off as *universal*. I ask, why not choose to be *you* when you philosophize?

LIBERATING PHILOSOPHY: ON WHY I FAST PHILOSOPHICALLY

For many individuals attempting to philosophize from racialized identities, philosophy can (and should) mean so much more than the above. At the very least, it should help liberate the mind as well as the body. Problem is, the former is typically viewed as exclusive to philosophy, the locus of our freedom and volition (if such things exist), while the latter is obviously important, but a contingent and accidental fact about you. For racialized “minorities,” however, seemingly adding new significance to Glaucon’s argument in *The Republic* that the semblance of being a good person is more important than actually *being* good, one cannot take their corporeal existence lightly. How you look in the eyes of others can result in life or death. Unfortunately, as this essay explains, most academic philosophy takes place from a perspective of great privilege, where how one appears or looks to others is irrelevant (and, moreover, *should* be irrelevant when it comes to philosophy). The kinds of questions that philosophers ask (i.e., “big questions”) take for granted a philosophical subjectivity that is more or less secure. Freedom of mind, thought, and conscience are prerequisite and assumed outright. For women, racial minorities, colonized peoples (and those whose sense of self begins from a position of oppression) such a starting point is a luxury. To think from these perspectives means one cannot help but use philosophy *for the sake of freedom*.

Think about it in terms of hunger. When you are hungry all you can do is think about food (the stuff of Snickers commercials). Once you are satiated, when you have eaten, then you are capable of entertaining and contemplating abstract philosophical questions (those about God, life, death, good and bad, etc.). Philosophy, to continue with this metaphor, often begins from the point of view of persons stuffed to the gills! To philosophize in a way where you matter, the racialized and gendered you, means that one uses philosophy such that it resembles “the love of wisdom,” but more so in terms of how wisdom sets us free from misguided and hubristic ways of knowing. Along these lines, in “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” an essay that has become an important point of departure for much of my work, Ellacuría writes,

We can say that philosophy has always had to do with freedom, though in different ways. It has been assumed that philosophy is the task of free individuals and free peoples, free at least of the basic needs that can suppress the kind of thinking we call philosophy. We also acknowledge that it has a liberating function for those who philosophize and that as the supreme exercise of reason, it has liberated people from obscurantism, ignorance, and falsehood. Throughout the centuries, from the pre-Socratics to the Enlightenment, through all methods of *critical* thinking, we have ascribed a great superiority to reason, and to philosophical reason in particular, as a result of its liberating function.

He continues, “[T]his matter of *philosophy* and *freedom* gets to the fundamental purpose of philosophical knowledge,

which even if it is understood as a search for truth, cannot be reduced to being a search for truth for its own sake.”¹⁰ We should appreciate philosophy for its liberatory potential.

How is this liberatory potential cut short when sexual, racial, and political oppression are not viewed as proper or “traditional” philosophical topics? Moreover, given that philosophy as a discipline seemingly thrives when written in the guise of dialogues, how is this field needlessly restrained when it delineates the range of perspective to sanctified, hegemonic perspectives that speak on behalf of all of humanity?

While philosophy might survive in the above described ways, it surely will not thrive. In addition to its institutionalized formulations, philosophy must shift from an erudite “love of wisdom,” a benchmark on the register of Western civility, to a process in which “the *telos* of thinking, if there is any, is the struggle against dehumanization, understood as the affirmation of sociality and the negation of its negation [coloniality],” to quote Nelson Maldonado-Torres.¹¹ That is to say, philosophy is not an end in itself but part of the struggle against multiple forms of dehumanization and oppression. It is the affirmation of sociality and the denial of antisocial behavior. Philosophy ought not only to free one from misuses of reason or the type of intellectual laziness from which all humans suffer, but it also should be used to liberate ourselves from the types of intellectual nonage imposed by social injustice, racial and gendered totalization, and oppression. In using philosophy to think about the particularities of human existence, we should philosophize as hungry persons. Again, I ask, how are you (i.e., the person you are, your identity, your race, gender, ethnicity, or nationality) relevant to philosophy?

I conclude with the prayer, as he refers to it, Frantz Fanon uses to end *Black Skin, White Mask*: “O my body, always *make of me a man who questions!*”¹² I find these words to be hauntingly bothersome and yet extremely fascinating and important. I am bothered by them not because I dislike this statement. Being a man of color in professional academic philosophy, I often find myself often repeating Fanon’s prayer as a mantra. This passage is perplexing, however, because it comes at the end of a book devoted to thinking through the significance of the Black body, in a way that sees it burdened by negative valuations and internalized displeasure. To paraphrase what Fanon writes at the onset of *The Wretched of the Earth*, decolonization results in a new humanism, a novel social order, one in which the relations of domination that define the meaning of “white” and “Black” today are destroyed and constructed anew; the replacement of one species of humankind with another. Along these lines, the above prayer signifies Fanon’s attempt at finding value in his Black body in the midst of a world that devalues it. In these words, Fanon recognizes his Black body as enabling philosophical reflection, just the type of attitude towards race and processes of racialization I advocate for in this essay.

Nevertheless, for one’s body to become the source of philosophical skepticism, it has to inhabit the site of social exclusion. It has to bear the mark of difference and run against the racial, gender, and sexual normativity of

one's social structure. If not "different," one will not be afforded the looks, the bewilderment, the fear, the gaze that generates the level of self-awareness leading to the type of questioning that Fanon is grateful for. Along these lines, I, too, am grateful for being different (especially in philosophy, to say the least). Being a nonwhite Latino, I recall (as a child, mind you) the feeling and shame of not being "American." Although I was born in the United States and hold US citizenship, I distinctively remember thinking that if you closed your eyes and pictured the ideal "American," a brown-skinned boy from the east side of Los Angeles would not be the first picture that came to mind. The American imaginary remains thoroughly racialized, gendered, regionalized (say, coming from the Midwest or East Coast), linguistically impoverished (that is, monolingual), overly Christian, and heterosexual (and I'm sure there is more). Being Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx, whichever one prefers, allowed me the epistemic vantagepoint to question what it means to be "American," a citizen of the United States. For me, membership is not something I take lightly.

And yet, for such a proclivity to questioning to be possible, the racial normativity that accompanies white supremacy had to have come into effect (and this is where I am bothered by Fanon's words). I often worry about those times in which whiteness or white supremacy becomes necessary, where we find some meaning in the existence of whiteness. Here, this worry about constructing a theodicy for whiteness is inspired by what Aimé Césaire writes in *Discourse on Colonialism*: "[B]etween colonization and civilization there is an infinite distance; that out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statutes that have been drawn up, out of all the memoranda that have been dispatched by all the ministries, there could not come a single human value."¹³ For these reasons, my nonwhite body *should not* be the means through which I approach philosophy. However, it is, and as such, my approach to philosophy does not end with enlightenment, but liberation.

NOTES

1. This essay is an abridged version of "Why Philosophy Does Not (And Should Not) Happen in a Vacuum" (in review). An early version of it was published in *The Write News: The Write Attitude Newsletter*, Spring 2017, Issue 8, 9–11. Elements of the last section draw from Grant J. Silva, "The Americas Seek not Liberation but Enlightenment," *The Pluralist* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 1–21.
2. Charles Mills, "Philosophy Race. Philosophy Erased," in *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge*, George Yancy, ed. (Albany: SUNY, 2012), 45.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 60.
5. Ibid., 61.
6. John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1971), 3.
7. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 6–7. Rawls's second limitation is that he wishes to "examine the principles of justice that would regulate a well-ordered society." He continues, "Everyone is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions" (8). This is called "strict compliance theory," an idea that has generated a comprehensive academic literature. In fact, most Rawlsian literature explores the question of whether or not a well-ordered society implies that people share common conceptions of the good, and whether or not people would behave justly if presented with the opportunity to do so.

8. John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001), 26.
9. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 12 (emphasis added).
10. Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy (1985)," in *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, Michael E. Lee, ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 94.
11. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking at the Limits of Philosophy," in *Reframing the Practice of Philosophy: Bodies of Color, Bodies of Knowledge*, George Yancy, ed. (Albany: SUNY, 2012), 261.
12. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 206.
13. Aimé Césaire, "Discourse on Colonialism," trans. Joan Pickham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 11–12.

Chicanx Existentialism as Liberation Philosophy

José-Antonio Orosco
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Mexican philosophy of the twentieth century has experienced a renaissance in North America in the last few years. In Mexico, the work of Guillermo Hurtado, Carlos Pareda, and Mario Teodoro Ramirez has revived interest in thinkers such as Octavio Paz, Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga, and others associated with the mid-century collective, *el Grupo Hiperion*.¹ This loose fellowship of Mexican philosophers concerned themselves with uncovering the foundations of *lo Mexicano*, or authentic Mexican identity, and rescuing it from the obfuscations of colonial history and more recent nationalist ideology. The recovery of these Mexican philosophers has inspired Robert E. Sanchez Jr. and Carlos Alberto Sánchez in the United States to bring this Mexican philosophy into English translation.² One of their aims is to place Mexican existentialists into conversation with European existentialists and US American pragmatists³ in hopes of building the intellectual infrastructure for a dialogue that can diversify the canons of existentialist, phenomenological, and pragmatist philosophy. A second goal is to provide a philosophical method that can serve as a model for the development of liberatory Latinx philosophy in the United States.⁴

In this essay, I want to contribute to this ongoing project by recognizing that twentieth-century Mexican philosophy was a starting point for Chicanx philosophers who reflected on Mexican American cultural identity in the late 1960s. Mexican thinkers such as Octavio Paz, Jose Vasconcelos, Samuel Ramos, and their Spanish inspiration, Jose Ortega y Gasset, provided Chicanx philosophers with a sense of continuity between Mexican and Chicanx worldviews and a "theoretical/philosophical vision about their own identity."⁵ In particular, I focus here on the work of Elihu Carranza who, in the early 1970s, sought to develop an original Chicanx existentialism that could help construct a unique cultural identity, and recover ethical values, for Mexican Americans in the United States. Carranza believes this project of Chicanx existentialism important for two reasons. As I examine in the first section, Carranza maintains that Chicanx identity takes up existential responsibility for itself in a way

that eludes the twentieth-century Mexican philosophers in their quest for *lo Mexicano*. This successful articulation of Chicax identity, according to Carranza, allows Chicax existentialism to aspire toward a new kind of humanism, one built around an ethical relationship centered on the Chicax concept of *carnalismo*. I examine the outlines of this Chicax humanism in the second section. In the end, Carranza hoped this Chicax-informed humanism would not only create an ethical foundation for the further development of the Mexican American people in the United States, but he believed it could also help to challenge the foundations of white supremacy in the United States and offer a social critique that would be useful for creating a liberatory perspective for other ethnic groups, including other Latinx and white people.

THE CHICANO APPROPRIATION OF MEXICAN PHILOSOPHY

In his survey of early Chicax journals and Chicax studies course syllabi from 1968 to 1975, Michael Soldatenko discovers that the writings of philosophers Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos, and Jose Ortega y Gasset played key roles in providing an intellectual foundation for the discipline.⁶ These works influenced early Chicax philosophers to conceive of Chicax identity as a continuation of Mexican identity. Moreover, Mexican philosophy provided rich conceptual frameworks with which to proceed in an examination of that Chicax life. Two particular themes from Mexican thought emerge significantly in this early Chicax philosophy, according to Soldatenko.

First, from Ortega y Gasset, Chicax thinkers took the notion of perspectivalism, the notion that all knowledge of self and world is articulated through a historical, social, and cultural context, a perspective through which one makes sense of one's own identity and place within the world. This perspective or outlook is not something that can be transcended, or overcome, in order to achieve absolute and objective knowledge—no such ultimate perspective is actually accessible to anyone.⁷ As Carlos Sánchez adds, Ortega's ideas became a defining feature of several twentieth-century Mexican philosophers such as Leopoldo Zea, Emilio Uranga, and Jorge Portilla. All of them turned away from thinking of a universal "man in general" as a starting point of philosophical reflection and moved toward investigating the unique historical circumstances constituting the Mexican interpretation of self and culture.⁸

Second, Chicax philosophers followed their Mexican predecessors in adopting a phenomenological method for examining their cultural identity. Carlos Sánchez describes the approach that Mexican existentialists took in their work as "analytically introspective [or] auscultatory." Mexican thinkers, such as Uranga, maintained that the "aim of auscultation is ultimately to detect and deconstruct the meta-narratives, ideologies, or pretensions that frame modern Mexican subjectivity, such as the narrative of national exceptionalism that grows out of the revolution."⁹ Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos, for example, followed in this auscultatory mode, each of them focusing on either the masked nature of Mexican subjectivity, or the psychological neuroses and inferiority complex of the flawed *pelado*

personality type. Uranga, Paz, and Ramos all believed that authentic Mexican identity was something to be uncovered by a kind of philosophical analysis that involved peeling back the layers of ideological obstructions laid down by the experience of colonialism, economic dependence, and the history of the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920.

These two themes both intermingle within Elihu Carranza's reflections on Chicax identity. Carranza's starting point is, in fact, the work of Octavio Paz. In his classic book *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), Paz called for Mexicans to engage in self-examination of their cultural identity. Doing so would reveal "a deep rooted sadness about Mexico and its place in the universe; a sadness that emerges most notably in Mexican poetic expression" and other popular culture.¹⁰ This sadness and melancholy, Paz surmised, is partly a result of the self-realization that Mexicans have been a "subjected people" since the time of the European conquest and who now fearfully hide behind masks, or facades, to conceal their feelings of inadequacy and inferiority from the rest of the world. Paz writes:

It is revealing that our intimacy never flowers in a natural way, only when incited by fiestas, alcohol or death. Slaves, servants, and submerged races always wear a mask, whether smiling or sullen. Only when they are alone, during the great moments of life, do they dare to show themselves as they really are. All their relationships are poisoned by fear and suspicion; fear of the master and suspicion of their equals.¹¹

For Paz, one of those grand moments of fiesta and death that allowed the genuine Mexican character to surface was the Mexican Revolution. At the heart of the upheaval was a dedication to the preservation of land rights and communal ways of living—rooted in the indigenous past—that gave all Mexicans the space to commune with one another without fear and suspicion and the interference of foreign powers and ideologies.¹² The tragedy for Paz, as well as for Zea and Uranga, was that this authentic moment was buried by the institutionalization of the revolution into a formal political party of the Mexican state: the Institutional Revolutionary Party, also known by its Spanish acronym: PRI. Under the PRI, the Mexican government took it upon itself to promote an all-encompassing brand of nationalism that glossed over the differences among the Mexican people exposed by the revolution. The task, then, for Mexican existentialists, such as *el Grupo Hiperion*, became to initiate a search for the "depths of the situated human being so as to awaken a consciousness of existential struggle ("misery") and uncertainty, of "lo mexicano" in its ontological/philosophical dimensions."¹³

Carranza's reading of Paz, however, detects a hesitation or fear to take this deep auscultatory examination of situated identity very far. The authentic Mexican identity only peers out in moments of unguarded passion, but the Mexican existentialists did not continue to theorize about what might be needed to tend to this identity and help it flower. This hesitation for self-reflection and further philosophical guidance is something that Carranza believes Mexican Americans started to overcome in the 1960s:

And this is the essence of the Chicano cultural revolution. A confrontation and a realization of worth and value through a brutally honest self-examination has occurred, and has revealed to Chicanos a link with the past and a leap into the future, a future which Chicanos are fashioning, a future that has validity for Chicanos because Chicanos are the agents, i.e. the creators and builders of their destiny.¹⁴

The Chicano *Movimiento* of the 1960s, then, created the material and political conditions that allowed Mexican Americans to begin examining their own circumstances and history and to “deconstruct the meta-narratives and ideologies” that had come to frame their identity as people of Mexican descent living in the United States. The aim of the movement, in Carranza’s mind, would be to build a social order that allows Chicanos to fully embody the reality of their particular historical development and cultural circumstances, to live out their authentic identity and build a new role for themselves as social agents in the US. So unlike the handful of Mexican philosophers in *el Group Hiperion* who were concerned about whether their phenomenological analyses could actually unravel the cultural confusions layered on by the Mexican state and its ideas of an official *lo mexicano*—and thereby rouse the Mexican people from their apathetic and inauthentic slumber—Carranza believed that Chicanos had built a widespread social movement for the development of a new Mexican American perspective that could blossom into a new ethical orientation for humanity itself.

CHICANX ASCULTATION

Carranza opens his Chicano phenomenological inquiry by noting that a common question, both within and outside of the Movement, was “Who is a Chicano?” Two responses were common. The answer from mainstream society usually relied on an ethnic basis, claiming that a Chicano is a person of Mexican descent, born or living in the United States. The term “Chicano,” then, is synonymous with “Mexican American.” Chicano activists, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on the idea that a Chicano is someone of Mexican descent who explicitly espouses pride in Mexican cultural heritage and seeks to eliminate discrimination barriers toward equal opportunity for Mexican Americans.¹⁵ Indeed, this was the definition provided by scholars and activists involved in drafting the 1969 *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, the document that laid the groundwork for the grassroots student organization *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)*.¹⁶ Thus, under this understanding, Chicano identity is not just a matter of ethnic or familial descent, but of political attitude and orientation—one could be of Mexican background living in the United States but not be Chicano because one felt ashamed of, or rejected, embracing one’s cultural background and values.

This discussion about the usage of the term “Chicano” opens up for Carranza the more philosophically interesting question: If being a Chicano is a matter of having a particular orientation toward the world or interpretive framework, then what exactly does it mean to embody the Chicano worldview or perspective? Using this Ortegaen insight, then, Carranza seeks to know what is the distinct way that

Chicanos experience the world and self? Here, then, it is clear that Carranza is searching for a kind of intersubjective subjectivity of the Chicano, the space in which one comes to an awareness of one’s own being between the discursive categories that have previously been imposed to define oneself:

The Chicano perspective is one way of seeing relevant data in a meaningful relation within reality, as defined and experienced by Chicanos. Thus understood, it follows that the oft asked question, who is a Chicano? Becomes a question not of substances and essential properties (or a variant of Mexicanism, whatever that may be) but of understanding and realistically owning an indigenous, and therefore unique point of view.¹⁷

For Carranza, the key to understanding the Chicano perspective is to understand that it arises out of a “hyphenated” experience of being a Mexican American, that is, of a person who experiences the world in terms of what Carranza calls a “duality of relations.”¹⁸ Unlike how many contemporary Chicano theorists, such as Gloria Anzaldua or Ana Castillo, talk about Mexican American identity in terms of hybridity, *mestiza*, or mixed identity, Carranza does not mean a duality between Mexican and American identities, or of two different cultures intersecting though one individual, community, or borderlands.¹⁹ Instead, Carranza thinks the duality of relations at the heart of the Chicano experience is between *connectedness* and *disconnectedness*, or what he terms the two relationships of “difference from ()” and “difference toward ().”²⁰

The Chicano experience of disconnect means that Chicanos are related to but *different from* Mexicans. As Carranza understands it, Chicanos are ethnically related to Mexican nationals, but they have made the social and intellectual commitment to undergo the deep and ongoing auscultatory examination of cultural identity only hinted at, but not successfully carried out, by the Mexican existentialists. Chicanos are also *different from* other Mexican Americans who choose, under the social pressure of dominant society, to conceal their cultural difference and try to assimilate into a mainstream US American cultural narrative of middle-class stability that “depends on Anglo promises, values, or systems of rewards.”²¹ He summarizes:

Chicanos, then, are Mexican Americans who, unlike their ancestors, have removed their masks revealing themselves in confrontation against their oppressors and who, unlike other Mexican Americans, have acquired different perceptions of themselves concerning their role, purposes, and goals. . . . I would say that the Chicano role is guided by the principle of self-determination.²²

Carranza believes that the struggle by Chicanos to realize this dimension of Chicano identity was not without real dangers. Chicano history hints at the kinds of social and material changes needed to accomplish this kind of auscultatory investigation. He recalls that previous generations of Mexican Americans, particularly the Pachuco youths of the 1940s, attempted to explore and assert

their cultural heritage within the confines of dominant US American society and were violently suppressed. In 1943, scores of young Mexican Americans were terrorized by police and members of the US military in a variety of cities for wearing a popular style of clothing called zoot suits.²³ These zoot suits, with their long coats and baggy pants, exaggerated mainstream men's attire and were popular among Black and Latinx youth. After the US government prohibited the production of the suits in order to conserve fabric for the war effort, young Mexican American men and women were attacked in public, especially in Los Angeles, and many were stripped of their zoot suits down to their underwear. The reaction to this violence by Mexican Americans, according to Carranza, was a fearful rejection of their cultural difference. This Mexican American generation chose to turn away from their heritage and assimilate into US American society: "The Mexican American price was an act of self-immolation in terms of a rejection of heritage and culture, falsely construed as necessarily an inhuman culture of 'spics' and 'greasers', since it did not conform to the unquestioned standard of 'civilized' children."²⁴ Thus, like Mexicans in Mexico, Mexican Americans before the Chicana *Movimiento* chose to conceal their identities and reveal them only in private intimate moments away from the gaze of mainstream society.

Mexican Americans continued to veil their cultural identity after witnessing the attempt of another group of young people to question the values of US American society some two decades after the Zoot Suit Riots. According to Carranza, the countercultural hippies of the 1960s represented an attempt by young white people to transform US American culture. He calls them the "clutch people" because they tried to "shift gears to a higher level of ethical consciousness in terms of the moral and spiritual dimensions of existence that bind us."²⁵ The hippies were not necessarily trying to create, or import, an alternative value system in US American society, according to Carranza. Instead, the hippies were interested in putting putative mainstream US American values such as "love of one's neighbor," forgiveness, justice, mercy, and equality of opportunity into practice. However, for Carranza, the hippies made little headway in fermenting this kind of cultural revolution and, by the end of the 1960s, were largely ignored or repressed. This demonstrated to Carranza that mainstream US American society relied on a different set of principles than the ones professed in the narrative of the "American Dream." The suppression of the hippies revealed to him that US American society is built on a nativist, white nationalist core that has scarce room for the expression of Mexican American culture or alternative ideas of America:

It became evident to many Chicanos that there was no hope for them within a set of values the application of which always placed them a priori and arbitrarily at a disadvantage. A set of values the application of which systematically divides the world into the strong and the weak, the superior and the inferior, the best and the worst—according to race—constitutes a distorted world view. It has proven to be a world view of unrealistic hopes and promises for the Chicanos.²⁶

Thus, the reason the Chicana *Movimiento* was so important for Carranza is that it created the social and intellectual space for Mexican Americans to envision their relationships to other social groups in a wholly new and productive way.

With this inventory of the *different from*, Carranza thinks we can begin to sketch out the other side of the duality that shapes the Chicana perspective: the *difference toward* relationship. The Chicana worldview is not simply an oppositional stance defining itself against what it is not (not-Mexican, not-US American, and not-Mexican American), but also about an active attempt to find or discover another sense of unity, connectedness, or wholeness. In other words, to be Chicana is also to be involved in an existential project, working *toward* a not-yet-arrived-at authenticity. Chicana identity, then, is not primarily about familial or ethnic descent, nor about political values and affiliation. It is, for Carranza, a dual existential commitment to 1) comprehend the world from a fully decolonized Mexican American perspective that is liberated from its Mexican and US American cultural obfuscations, and to 2) express a way of life that embodies elements of Mexican American heritage and traditions that have been authentically developed.²⁷

Carranza does not attempt an extensive catalog of what he considers to be the Mexican American heritage and traditions required for authentic Chicana living in the *difference toward* mode. Instead, he sees his task as laying the ground for those kinds of discussions, using philosophy to clarify "the set of presuppositions or assumptions which Chicanos hold, consciously or unconsciously, about the basic makeup of their world."²⁸ Carranza is clear, however, that one of these basic foundations of the Chicana perspective is the idea of living-in-community, or in solidarity, with others. The *difference toward* relationship is a kind of ethical comportment that Carranza thinks is best represented in the Chicana ideal of *carlismo*. *Carlismo* was a popular concept during the Chicana *Movimiento*. It typically meant a strong sense of love, attachment, friendship, or camaraderie, usually between men who considered each other *carlales*. The word "carnal" derives from the Spanish word "carne" or flesh; thus, to be someone's carnal is "to be of the same flesh together." For Carranza, then, to be Chicana means to strive to embody an ethical attitude in which "each man recognizes himself in the face of each man."²⁹

One way to understand what Carranza means by this formulation of *carlismo* is to consider the work "Pensamiento Serpentino" by Chicana poet and artist Luis Valdez, founder of the renowned *Teatro Campesino*. In this poem, published in 1971, Valdez incorporated an idea that he learned from the work of Mexican philosopher Domingo Martinez Paredes—the Mayan notion of *In Lak'ech*. Valdez describes the ideal of *In Lak'ech* in the following excerpt from the poem:

Tu eres mi otro yo
You are my other me

Si te hago dano a ti
If I do harm to you

Me hago dano a mi mismo
I do harm to myself.

Si te amo y respeto
If I love and respect you

Me amo y respeto yo
I love and respect myself.³⁰

For Valdez, using this indigenous idea of right relationship between individuals offered a spiritual underpinning to the moral lessons of unity and common struggle he wished to portray in his theatrical dramas about Chicana life. It was an idea that came to permeate his thinking, and many other Chicana theater and activist groups of the era either struggled to incorporate these indigenous concepts or to find other political alternatives for describing the sense of communal solidarity it articulated.³¹

Given the popularity of Valdez's work among Chicana intellectuals and activists, it seems appropriate to imagine that part of what Carranza wanted to accomplish with his idea of *carnalismo*—as the basic ethical comportment of the Chicana perspective in which “each man recognizes himself in the face of each man”—is to give an existential interpretation of the Mayan concept of *In Lak'ech*. This would make sense of what Carranza means when he says that to be Chicana is to engage in “understanding and realistically owning an indigenous, and therefore unique point of view”: to be a Chicana is to be a person who proceeds in life by expressing one's relatedness to other human beings in terms of responsibility, reciprocity, and mutual self-constitution. Again, this is not a comportment that comes naturally to Mexican Americans by way of their heritage and ancestry, but is an intentional existential and ethical ideal that Carranza hoped could be sought by those Mexican Americans willing to undergo Chicana auscultation.

MEXICAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY Y MAS

Carlos A. Sánchez maintains that the value of the Mexican existentialism of *el Grupo Hiperion* for US Latinxs is not so much in the particular conclusions at which the Mexican thinkers arrived, but in the example they offer of the promise of philosophical labor. He writes: “Whether they failed or triumphed as motivating and instructional tools for Mexicans of the mid-twentieth century is not important for our purposes; it is the work itself that is. It gives us an opportunity to engage in a similar project.”³² The project Sanchez has in mind is the development of a liberatory Latinx philosophy that can help to achieve self-empowerment of the Latinx community in the United States. The treasure of the Mexican existentialist tradition, of course, is that they attempted to give a philosophical method for unpacking the oppressive narratives that masked authentic Mexican identity. There is a similar struggle for Latinxs to the extent to which they self-identify, and are described by mainstream society, as outsiders, criminals, and threats to US American life in general. Sanchez argues:

Militancy and activism may politically affect the material circumstances underlying vital oppressions, and might indeed be required for the possibility of overcoming and flourishing, but

what must change are the standard narratives that inform our inner selves. To challenge those narratives what is needed is a violent appropriation that preserves and overcomes; in other words, what is needed is a reading into our traditions, those that are constitutive of our historical identity and those that, while framing our present and our future, reject or marginalize us. In the Mexican challenge to philosophy we read the possibility of challenging such narratives, and such traditions, but especially those that aim, through fear, coercion, or promises of reward, to strip us of all traces of difference and particularity.³³

In this essay, I suggest that the foundations for such a liberatory project have already been laid with Carranza's Chicana existentialism. Carranza saw himself as following in the wake of the mid-century Mexican thinkers, taking on their notions of historically situated and perspectival knowledge of self and world as a basis for examining Mexican American life in the United States. However, Carranza believed that Mexican Americans had actually gone farther than the Mexican existentialists. While Jorge Portilla and Emilio Uranga hoped that their reflections might spur Mexican society toward self-examination, Carranza believed that Mexican Americans had sparked the widespread social, political, intellectual and artistic movement to engage in identity examination and, in particular, to support a philosophical examination of the Chicana perspective. Since Sánchez's work is motivated by an attempt to expand the Western philosophical canon, particularly in regard to its existentialist components, so as to speak to Latinxs in the United States, then Carranza's work can be an important trans-american bridge between *el Grupo Hiperion* and contemporary Latinxs.

In the decolonial mode of “difference from (),” Carranza's Chicana phenomenology provides a philosophical method that allowed Mexican Americans to peel away the layers of stereotypes and historical traditions that weigh down their community with feelings of self-doubt and alienation. In doing this rigorous self-examination, Mexican Americans would reveal some of the dynamics of white supremacy at the heart of the American dream narrative. Chicana auscultation demonstrates how the lure of assimilation and the material rewards of white-dominant society create obstructions for the success of Chicana youth. Thus, other Latinx groups in the US can take the method of the Chicana auscultation and begin to articulate the specific manners in which they are “different from” their own Latin American cultures of origin, as well as the US mainstream. Of course, care would have to be taken not to generalize the results of the Chicana perspective to other Latinx groups in the United States, since they may not share the same racial or cultural narratives or political situatedness to white mainstream society as have Mexican Americans.³⁴

In the humanist mode of “difference toward (),” Chicana existentialism offers Mexican Americans the opportunity to engage in a new ethical composure, a space to sift through the experience of Mexican American life for the traditions and values, such as *carnalismo*, that build and solidify the community of mutual recognition and respect that

undergird identity exploration. Carranza's reflections on this dimension of Chicana duality were published in 1978, with an unfulfilled promise to provide more philosophical guidance for the development of other traditions and practices underlying authentic Chicana identity. While Carranza did not continue this project, Chicana feminists, starting in the 1980s and 1990s, composed compelling existential examinations of Chicana life. Perhaps the most significant foundational text in this vein is Gloria Anzaldúa's *La Frontera/Borderlands*, a phenomenological investigation of Mexican American life that extracts its insights about cultural identity from history, linguistics, women-of-color feminism, queer theory, and Native American wisdom traditions. Other notable works in this vein include Ana Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Chicana* (1995), Cherrie Moraga's *The Last Generation* (1993), Jacqueline Martinez's *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity: Communication and Transformation in Praxis* (1995), and, more recently, Mariana Ortega's *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (2016). All of these works focus on opening up the lived experiences of Chicanas and discerning the interconnection of social norms, selfhood, and cultural values. Most importantly, these works question the way in which Chicana ideals, such as Carranza's *caralismo*, reflect patriarchal inflections. They offer more fine-tuned analyses of the ways in which oppressive practices constrain the liberatory potential of the "difference toward" mode.

For Carranza, Chicana humanism could also serve to model liberatory philosophy for other non-Latina peoples, offering a way to think through and beyond oppressive social ideologies and institutions. His rendering of Chicana auscultation, for instance, involves recognizing that white youth also revolted against the narrative of middle-class achievement and US American political power in the 1960s to the point that the nation suffered a legitimation crisis. This suggests, perhaps, that Chicana existentialist thought can be a catalyst and a tool for US Americans to analyze dominant ideological constructions, such as the nature of the "American dream" or "whiteness," that obscure the exercise of power and control within US American history and traditions. In this way, Carranza's work follows in the line of other Chicana thinkers who thought that the Chicana *Movimiento* could offer lessons to white US Americans about what is oppressive within US American culture and what is needed to be healed: Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales often railed against the "sterilization of the soul" offered by middle-class materialism and participated in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign in 1968 to raise awareness of the effects of poverty; Cesar Chavez campaigned against corporate power that threatened to poison the nation's food supply and corrupt political processes through short-sighted greed; Armando Rendón criticized the "gringo mentality" that promoted military dominance in the Americas and proposed Chicana culture as an inter-American bridge for Latin American diplomacy; and Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez criticized founding myths within US American history that obscure the ways nationhood depended upon slavery, genocide, and military conquest for solidification and suggest paying attention to forms of social movement organizing by Latina communities for models of political solidarity and community building.³⁵

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I argue for the recovery of Carranza's Chicana existentialism for three reasons. A Chicana existentialism that evolves out of Mexican philosophy represents a connective tissue between Mexican and US American thinkers, further facilitating the kind of inter-American dialogue between different philosophical traditions and perspectives that philosophers in the US and Mexico have recently initiated. Yet, while it exhibits continuity with Mexican philosophy from the twentieth century, Chicana existentialism of the 1970s intimates that Mexican American philosophy deserves to be its own field of specialization, especially considering how Chicana theorists have expanded the use of phenomenology productively as a method to investigate Mexican American life in the last forty years. Finally, the revelation of a nascent Chicana existentialism demonstrates that the aim of developing a liberatory Latina philosophy shouldn't be thought of as aspirational, but, instead, is an effort that has already been underway for some time among Mexican Americans and offers promise as a dialogue partner for the development of other emancipatory perspectives within the United States, particularly those that want to interrogate ideas of "whiteness" and the US "American dream."

NOTES

1. See Guillermo Hurtado, *El Buho y el Serpiente: Ensayos Sobre la Filosofía en México del Siglo XX*, (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2007); Carlos Pareda, *La filosofía en México en el Siglo XX: Apuntes de un participante* (Mexico City: Dirección General de Publicaciones del Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2013).
2. Carlos Alberto Sánchez and Robert Eli Sanchez Jr., *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century: Essential Readings*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
3. I use "US American" to refer to residents of the United States, recognizing that "American" is often used to refer to the people and society of the United States, but also acknowledging that in Latin America the term is often used to refer to the entire continent and not just one of the nation states of North America.
4. In this essay, I adopt the gender inclusive terms "Chicana" and "Latina" to refer to Chicanos, Chicanas, as well as gender nonconforming and trans people within the Mexican American community, while retaining the use of "Chicano" in citations.
5. Michael Soldatenko, *Chicano Studies: The Genesis of a Discipline*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 68.
6. *Ibid.*, 68–69.
7. *Ibid.*, 69.
8. Carlos Alberto Sánchez, "20th Century Mexican Philosophy: Features, Themes, Tasks," *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, 7, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 4–5; see also Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).
9. Sánchez, "20th Century Mexican Philosophy," 4.
10. Carlos Alberto Sánchez, "The Demands of a Mexican Philosophy of History," *Dissidences: Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism* 2, no. 4 (2008): 5.
11. Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove, 1961), 70.
12. See Enrique Krauze, *Redeemers: Ideas and Power in Latin America*, trans. Hank Heifetz and Natasha Wimmer (New York: Harper, 2011), 188–89.
13. Sánchez, "20th Century Mexican Philosophy," 18.
14. Elihu Carranza, *Chicanismo: Philosophical Fragments* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1978), 10.

15. Ignacio M. Garcia, *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 34–36.
16. Carlos Munoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (London/New York: Verso, 1989), 79–84.
17. Carranza, *Chicanismo*, 37.
18. *Ibid.*, 38.
19. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Auntie Lute, 1994); Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1994).
20. Carranza, *Chicanismo*, 38.
21. Eliu Carranza, *Pensamientos on Los Chicanos: A Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: California Book, 1969), 11.
22. Carranza, *Chicanismo*, 55–56.
23. See Eduardo Obregon Pagan, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race & Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mauricio Mazon, *The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).
24. Carranza, *Chicanismo*, 11.
25. *Ibid.*, 16.
26. *Ibid.*, 17.
27. Carranza, *Pensamientos on Los Chicanos*, 16.
28. Carranza, *Chicanismo*, 130.
29. Carranza, *Pensamientos*, 16.
30. Luis Valdez, "In Lak'ech: You are My Other Me" *VUE: Voices in Urban Education*, <http://vue.annenberginstitute.org/perspectives/lak'ech-you-are-my-other>.
31. Jorge A. Huerta, "Luis Valdez's Zoot Suit: A New Direction for Chicano Theatre?" *Latin American Theatre Review* (Summer 1980): 72.
32. Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), 136.
33. *Ibid.*, 140.
34. Gregory Velazco y Trianosky, "Mestizaje and Hispanic Identity," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 283–96. I have suggested before that as we may be able to talk about a Chicano existentialism, it might also be possible to imagine something like Puerto Rican existentialism, for instance; these two kinds of auscultation would share some themes, but also be different from one another in other ways; see José-Antonio Orosco, "The Philosophical Gift of Brown Folks: Mexican American Philosophy in the United States," *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 23–28.
35. See Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, *Message to Aztlan: Selected Writings of Rodolfo Corky Gonzales*, ed. Antonio Esquibel, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2001); Cesar Chavez, "Wrath of Grapes," in *Cesar Chavez: An Organizer's Tale*, ed. Ilan Stavans (New York: Penguin, 2008), 193–97; Armando B. Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto* (Berkeley: Ollin, 1996); and Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (New York: Verso, 2017).

The Political Relevance of Kierkegaardian Humor in Jorge Portilla's Fenomenología del relajo

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In this paper I offer a defense of Jorge Portilla's *Phenomenology of Relajo* (1966) and his negative appraisal of "relajo," the "suspension of seriousness," over and against Carlos Sánchez's (2012) positive appraisal of the phenomenon. For Portilla, *relajo* is the repeated act of invoking a communal solidarity with the negation of "a value proposed to a group of people" by displacing attention from the value and its corresponding behavior toward nonvalue and a corresponding atmosphere of disorder.¹ In one of its more innocuous forms, the anniversary party that turns into a food fight is an instance of *relajo*.² Far from harmless, however, Portilla's analysis of the phenomenon reveals *relajo* as an obstacle that threatens human freedom and socio-political change towards genuine democratic community. Socratic irony is its antidote. By contrast, Sánchez finds in *relajo* an attitude of resistance and an alternative means to liberatory struggles against oppressive power structures, a claim he supports by finding Portilla's view misguided by his inheriting an oppressive, Western prejudice, pointing back to Socrates, that thinking well requires thinking seriously. I support my defense with Kierkegaard's account of Socratic humor as an alternative to Sánchez's reading of Socratic seriousness as "colonial seriousness" in Portilla.³

Two central concerns frame Portilla's phenomenological study of *relajo*. The first is uncontested: the imperialism of Western reason, capitalism, and its colonialism perpetrate systemic oppression against freedom and democratic community.⁴ The second is the question over which attitudinal orientation to value best serves the liberatory task of transforming oppressive noncommunity into genuine community?⁵ To this end Portilla considers four attitudinal candidates: the ironist, the humorist, the *relajiento* (the agent who engenders a *collective* suspension of serious value), and the *apretado* (the self-assuming proprietor of value). His verdict is that "'Relajientos' and 'apretados' constitute two poles of dissolution of that difficult task . . . the constitution of a Mexican community, of a genuine community, and [the overcoming of] a society divided into proprietors and the dispossessed."⁶

To see why Portilla arrives at this verdict, it is necessary to point out his standard for evaluation, that is, phenomenology's universal law of intentionality, which he also formulates as the Socratic commitment to the negative truth in affirming the nonpossession or ignorance of value.⁷ This obligation to truth means affirming the "negation [that] is the same one that all human beings have inside," namely, that we cannot possess value as we do a house or propositional knowledge.⁸ Rather, the *ultimately nonproprietary, evanescent character of value* is necessary for making sense of our lives. The negative truth of value is a "guide for self-constitution" precisely because it is always

something we consciously chase after but which we can never quite arrive at possessing (e.g., punctuality).⁹

With Portilla's standard clearly in mind, in the following I will lay out Portilla's negative appraisal of the *relajiento* and the *apretado*, and his positive evaluation of the ironic attitude. I will then offer Sánchez's objections to Portilla before closing with a response to them by appeal to the Kierkegaardian humorist who, I argue, addresses Sánchez's concerns and surpasses all the other attitudes considered in terms of their liberatory and community-building capacities.

Against the standard of an ultimately nonproprietary relationship to value, it is easy to see why the *apretado* (that is, the proprietor of value) fails. The *apretado* affirms a tradition's values, but does so while taking on the uncritical attitude of *possessing* those values in their very being. This proprietary attitude, Portilla tells us, marks the "snob" who "refuses to take notice of the distance between 'being' and 'value,' in any manner in which this could occur."¹⁰ Because of this, the slightest criticism of the *apretado* is a severe insult; and one quickly learns simply to listen rather than to discuss value with him.¹¹ To the extent that the *apretado* prevents real dialogue and communication amongst its members, she also prevents genuine community.

The freedom of the *apretado's* relation to value that affirms itself as proprietor is a negative freedom that essentially rejects community. This is clear, Portilla argues, since here freedom means negating others in order to contradistinguish oneself as proprietor of property and value from those who have neither nor. Thus the *apretado's* mantra, "One who possesses is, one who does not is not."¹² If this were not enough to discourage community, Portilla finds that when the dispossessed claim this same freedom to embody worth and possesses property, the *apretado's* attitude turns from the love of freedom to the love of order and law, which corroborates the *apretado's* continued "pleasure of embodying value" over and against the dispossessed.¹³ In short, with its systemic "monopolizing pretense" the *apretado* serves as one pole of the dissolution of the possibility of community by dividing society into proprietors and the dispossessed.¹⁴

The *relajiento*, the agent of *relajo*, serves as the other pole impeding community and can be seen as the extreme reaction to the values proposed, or *imposed* by the colonizing and alienating world of the *apretado*.¹⁵ However, these two attitudes are not opposites since both, Portilla argues, "are negative freedoms [marked by the] rejection of community."¹⁶ *Relajientos* reject community by *repeatedly* inviting a *collective* unwillingness to engage in the values and behaviors a community proposes "to his or her freedom" until the "dizzying thrill of complicity in negation takes over the group—the most paradoxical of all communities."¹⁷ But real freedom, Portilla argues, requires the "possession of oneself within an order', whichever order this may be" and yet the *relajiento* wants the freedom to choose nothing and so "promotes disorder so as not to have to do anything in a prolonged action with sense."¹⁸ For this attitude, freedom means just saying no: to value, to order, and so also to freedom and community. Whereas the *apretado's* mantra is "One who possesses is; one who

does not is not," the *relajiento's* is "Fuck it!" but with the open invitation that we all do the same.¹⁹

Whereas *relajo* might be understood as the extreme reaction to the colonized world of the *apretado's* proprietary attitude to value, Portilla argues that irony is "the adequate response to the 'self-assuming person'."²⁰ Like the *apretado* and *relajo*, irony is a relationship between consciousness and value. But the ironist is a consciousness that judges the distance between the self-assumption of value and its possible ideal realization.²¹ The ironist, in short, gets right the ultimately nonproprietary character of value and accordingly consists in moving from the particular grasping for value towards the ideal that continually transcends all of our particular grasps. Whereas *relajo* suspends the link between the individual and serious value, irony signifies the Socratic commitment to the negative truth of value's transcendence, Socratic ignorance, or, as Portilla expresses it, the seriousness of standing "alone with myself before the value."²²

In addition, that irony's response to the self-assuming person is a *transformative communication* demonstrates irony's positive, community-building freedom.²³ For example, Portilla argues that when Socrates says to Euthyphro, "You know what piety is," his irony animates the proposition such that both it and Euthyphro change before us.²⁴ In contrast to the negative freedom of the *apretado* and *relajiento*, the transformative power that marks irony's freedom involves its revealing the limitations of both propositions and people to *possess* value. It reveals this and the transcendence of value precisely by its communicating the opposite and pointing beyond what is given both propositionally and in Euthyphro's vain self-assumption. Irony, Portilla argues, is affirmative "liberation for us" insofar as it removes the obstacle of vanity from the path of truth, transforms the world, and creates an opening, a foundation, for community and the communication of truth seekers for a constructive task.²⁵

Before turning to consider Portilla's Kierkegaardian account of humor, here I want to develop further the above by briefly considering Sánchez's objections to it. Rather than serving as one pole of the dissolution of community, Sánchez's thesis is that *relajo* signifies the dissident attitude of the marginalized, which has the potential as "a catalyst to political and social action."²⁶ He supports this by attacking two key presuppositions in Portilla's analysis: first, the seriousness of Socratic irony as the standard attitude for realizing the goals of value, order, freedom, and community building; and second, the infertility of *relajo's* dissident attitude regarding these same ends.²⁷

Appealing to the alternatives of Nietzschean play and the romantic appraisal of the fecundity of chaos, Sánchez rips the mask from the first presupposition to reveal Portilla's "strange," prejudicial "blindness to *other* ways of world making besides the ironic seriousness of Socrates."²⁸ Against Portilla's second presupposition about *relajo's* infertility, Sánchez argues that *relajo* is analogous to "death" as it figures in the tradition of Heidegger and phenomenology. *Relajo*, like death, must be a condition and deep source of meaning, since in the absence of

each there can be no futurity for human beings and so no transcendence of value, and thus no value.²⁹

Relajo, Sánchez further argues, appears impotent only when held against the “rationality of power and capitalism” to which Portilla wittingly or unwittingly subscribes since he rejects *relajo* on the grounds that it, like death, is incapable of serving as a valuable means to other, more profitable ends.³⁰ Absent this arbitrary standard, Sánchez concludes that “we cannot call [*relajo*] a negation of meaningful human being,” since the *relajo* individual is not necessarily impotent and infertile, as Portilla thinks, but rather a will capable of something like “the great refusal” by creating a collective suspension and disorder of colonizing seriousness imposed from without, and in this *relajo* shows its potential for world building.³¹

In response to Sanchez’s objections, I want to end here by offering a defense of Portilla’s account of *relajo* by appealing to Kierkegaard’s account of humor as an attitude surpassing the liberatory and community-building capacities of those attitudes hitherto considered. That Portilla himself considers Kierkegaardian humor as an attitude superior to irony suggests that he avoids Sánchez’s first charge and is not entirely blind “to *other* ways of world making besides the ironic seriousness of Socrates.”³² And against the charge that Portilla justifies this exclusion by adopting the arbitrary standard of instrumental thinking, we can note that the attitude of humor is instrumentally useless.

According to Portilla’s Kierkegaardian account, rather than ironically pointing to value, instrumental or otherwise, humor is an attitude that continually traverses the distance between human suffering and freedom.³³ The joke Portilla tells about the man who saved a person drowning simply because he wanted to *know* who threw the person in, or the one about the man who while looking for *menudo* gets stabbed and remarks, with his guts spilling out, that he could only get his own, illustrates humor.³⁴ The practical issue of whether one is saved or dies is not the issue here; rather, each joke illustrates that humor’s focus is the adversity and wretchedness of human existence and, ultimately, the freedom and responsibility to transcend it.

Given the magnitude of adversity in the struggle against the monopolizing pretense and systemic oppression of Western imperialism, reason, capitalism, and its colonialism, the humorist attitude seems nothing short of necessary for this liberatory struggle, since it essentially signifies that “humans continue to be responsible for their lives and the things they do . . . in spite of the fact that life drags along with it a formidable volume of difficulties and adversity.”³⁵ Still, of the two sorts of freedom which Portilla considers, instead of the *direct external sort* associated with instrumental reasoning, humor points to a “Stoic” *internal sort* for which what matters most is that there remains an interior freedom of the human being that cannot be canceled by external sufferings.³⁶ Humor, then, is an attitude poorly suited for instrumental reasoning and arbitrarily excluding others, namely, the dispossessed *relajiento*, due to instrumental infertility.³⁷

To the contrary, citing Kierkegaard, Portilla claims that because “humor is a hidden suffering it is also an instance of sympathy” rather than exclusion.³⁸ Humor essentially sympathizes since, in contrast to the ironist who works “from above,” from ideal value, the humorist operates “from below,” “perpetually oriented in the direction of . . . human wretchedness.”³⁹ Because of this, Portilla not only argues that the pleasantness of the humorist’s company surpasses the ironist’s, but also and not incidentally that so too does the humorist’s capacity for community building.⁴⁰ Humor sympathizes with all who suffer, that is, all who exist. Accordingly, humor is not directed to others as a source of laughter, as is, by contrast, irony’s movement between other’s self-assumption to value and the ideal. Humor depends on the freedom to laugh at all of existence and not least at oneself, and thus to endure and inhabit lands that irony cannot without the apparent need to silence its inhabitants.

Still, while humor surpasses irony in serving the liberatory task of transforming oppressive noncommunity into genuine community, Portilla nevertheless seems to champion Socratic irony over humor. Part of the reason for this perhaps is that humor for Kierkegaard points to the religious and away from the order and value that the *relajiento* likewise threatens. As Portilla puts it, again echoing Climacus, humor shows that [irony’s project] ends up abolished by the finiteness and adversity of existence.⁴¹ Humor’s movement from the suffering of human existence to freedom requires revoking in jest existence as a whole and so appears to move in the direction of *relajo*; since each suspends, or has the potential to suspend, the universal truth of the ethical order.⁴² It is perhaps this transgressive commonality between humor and *relajo* that forces Portilla’s hand to champion irony as the ideal liberatory attitude toward value.⁴³

However, by following Kierkegaard closer than Portilla is perhaps willing, one finds little warrant in siding with irony over humor because of humor’s transgressive character. Humor’s transgressive, negative freedom, which it shares with the *relajiento*, is that of the comic, but the comic in humor is born from the humorist’s awareness of the contradiction between the finitude of existence and her infinite passion for the idea. Humorists such as Socrates, according to Climacus, place the comic between themselves and others as an “incognito” in order to protect the sanctity of their infinite pathos for the ideal from becoming an occasion for their own or others’ comic misunderstanding.⁴⁴ This affirmative freedom and responsibility is absent in the *relajiento*.

And, as we have seen, while it is true that humor means knowing how to laugh at all of existence including oneself, humor is not simply the comic. It also means suffering life’s adversity and thus sympathizing with the living. Not surprisingly, then, Climacus defines humor as the “equilibrium between the comic and the tragic” and lauds Socrates as a humorist who unifies the two, an ethicist bordering on the religious.⁴⁵ In short, humor is not simply the comic transgression of established value and order. As equal parts tragic and comic, humor marks the double-movement of freedom that Portilla himself

seems to endorse, namely, that of (tragically) possessing “oneself within an order,” whichever order this may be” and simultaneously (comically) having “that ideal distance from myself,” which allows the possibility of my acting in “a direction opposite to that” order.⁴⁶

By reading Portilla’s *Phenomenology of Relajo* through Kierkegaard, I argue, we get a Socrates who is not simply reducible to the seriousness with which Sánchez indicts Portilla (and Kierkegaard by association) with colonialism. Rather, Socrates as humorist expresses an orientation of interdependency between committed earnestness and subversive jest towards the values conferred by the social-historical practices in which we find ourselves.⁴⁷ As such, I hope to have shown that the Socratic standard retains the subversive political virtue Sánchez finds in *relajo* without giving way to the disorder and indifference to value that makes *relajo* “infertile” for community building by Portilla’s lights. But, please note, this standard is that of Socratic humor, which while requiring and is capable of irony, also surpasses it as a liberatory attitude to value and genuine community building against a society divided into proprietors and the dispossessed.⁴⁸

NOTES

1. Jorge Portilla, *Fenomenologia del relajo*, trans. Eleanor March and Carlos Alberto Sánchez, in Sánchez’s *Suspension of Seriousness: On the Phenomenology of Jorge Portilla* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012), 135.
2. Portilla, 156.
3. Sánchez, 121.
4. Portilla, 127, 199; cf. Sánchez, 119.
5. Portilla, 169; cf. 125–26.
6. *Ibid.*, 199.
7. *Ibid.*, 176.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 177, 151.
10. *Ibid.*, 191.
11. *Ibid.*, 197.
12. *Ibid.*, 192; cf. 194–97.
13. *Ibid.*, 196.
14. *Ibid.*, 197.
15. Sánchez, 104–05. See also Sánchez’s argument that Portilla as a critic of modernity ought to concede that if modernity caused the *relajiento*, then it is modernity and not the *relajiento per se* that we ought to blame (*ibid.*, 116). An alternative causal explanation is that *relajiento* and *apretado* are each reactions of despair before the evanescence of value in the task of becoming a self.
16. Portilla, 198.
17. *Ibid.*, 128, 133–35; cf. Sánchez, 103.
18. Portilla, 188.
19. *Ibid.*, 192; cf. 194–97. I thank Carlos for this translation suggestion of the *relajo* attitude at the 17th Annual Meeting of the Phenomenology Roundtable at San Jose State University last summer, 2017.
20. *Ibid.*, 131.
21. *Ibid.*, 171.
22. *Ibid.*, 129.
23. *Ibid.*, 177.
24. *Ibid.*, 171.
25. *Ibid.*, 176.
26. Sánchez, 105.
27. *Ibid.*, 104.
28. *Ibid.*, 107, 110.
29. *Ibid.*, 109.
30. *Ibid.*, 109–10.
31. *Ibid.*, 114; 110–11, 116, 119–20.
32. *Ibid.*, 107, cf., 181, 184.
33. Portilla, 176–77; cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1992), 520–22 (hereafter, *CUP*).
34. *Ibid.*, 179–80. “‘Menudo’: a typical Mexican soup made with beef stomach and tripe” (Sánchez, 213, endnote 25).
35. *Ibid.*, 185.
36. *Ibid.*, 179; cf. 162–63. To be clear, Portilla argues that in internal freedom “nothing changes in the world with my change of attitude but I myself. But to the degree that I am part of the world . . . my change can be the beginning of the change in the world” (169).
37. In *Contingency and Commitment*, Sánchez continues to argue that Portilla’s solution to *relajo* and nihilistic attitudes is seriousness; and that this prescription for seriousness signifies modernity’s and Portilla’s faith in “the power of reason (‘logos’) to overcome nihilism and chaos . . . a defense of modernity and all that it represents, especially rational control over excessive, unchecked freedom in all of its forms.” See Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *Contingency and Commitment: Mexican Existentialism and the Place of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2016), 50–51; cf., 104.
38. Portilla, 184; Kierkegaard, *CUP*, 447–51.
39. *Ibid.*, 179.
40. *Ibid.*, 178–81.
41. *Ibid.*, 177. *CUP*, 501–02; 294–95.
42. Cf. Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*.
43. This seems the case even while Portilla himself sees that “irony and humor are negations [respectively, negations of the self-assumption of value and the adversity of existence] that affirm [respectively, affirmations of the transcendence of value and the possibility of freedom to overcome adversity], negations that negate themselves in an ulterior affirmation” (Portilla, 189).
44. *CUP*, 506–08. The comic misunderstanding of pathos results from taking on an attitude to value on the authority of another’s passion rather than what Portilla expresses as the seriousness of standing “alone with myself before the value” (Portilla, 129). Climacus poignantly remarks that failing in this is like laughing at a joke because others laugh, and in which case one can omit the joke (*CUP*, 325). The danger also goes the other way, that is, the admiration of others for one’s passion can also mislead one from the proper relationship to meaning, purpose, and value. Climacus illustrates the use of the comic as an incognito when he writes for Socrates as his mouthpiece, “It would sound like jesting if a person in receiving an invitation replied: I will come, definitely, believe me, except in case a roof tile falls down and kills me, because then I cannot come. And yet this may also be the highest earnestness, and the speaker, while jesting with someone, may be in the presence of the god” (*Ibid.*, 88).
45. *Ibid.*, 292, 503; cf., 87–92, 202–08. Published a year before *Postscript*, in 1845 Kierkegaard also expressed this view of Socrates in *Stages on Life’s Way*: “If, in accord with one of Plato’s views, one quite ingeniously takes Socrates to be the unity of the comic and the tragic, this is entirely right; but the question remains: in what does this unity consist?” Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s Way*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1988), 365–66.
46. Portilla, 188, 127. Portilla’s language of “possessing oneself within an order” is also used by Judge William in *Either/Or Part*

Two and is likewise expressed in terms of "suffering" in the esthete's essay on the tragic in *Either/Or Part One*. See Shoni Ranher, "Suffering Tragedy: Hegel, Kierkegaard and Butler on the Tragedy of *Antigone*" in *Mosaic* vol. 40 (2008): 63–79; "Kierkegaard and the Tearful, Laughable Goal of Human Nature and Narrative Unity" in *Acta Kierkegaardiana VI: Kierkegaard and Human Nature* vol. 6 (2013): 29–41; "*Antigone*: The Tragic Art of *Either/Or*" in *Kierkegaard's Literary Figures and Motifs in Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources* 16 (2014): 49–65.

47. CUP, 80–93.

48. Of course, according to Kierkegaard, humor as well will fail in this struggle and points to the religious as the liberatory attitude *par excellence*. This is fascinating not least for Portilla's own religious conversion; although his formula that Reason is God, at least by Sanchez's lights, does not fit right with Kierkegaard's formula that the Christian God is essentially an offense to reason (see Sánchez, *Contingency and Commitment*; Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*).

CONFERENCE REPORT

Report on the Third Latinx Philosophy Conference at Rutgers University

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The Third Latinx Philosophy Conference took place at Rutgers University, April 19–20, 2018. The conference aimed to create a space to facilitate discussion among Latinx philosophers and about Latinx philosophy from a wide range of philosophical backgrounds and traditions. Participants of the conference were engaged in conversation from a wide range of research within philosophy, as well as discourse focused on contemporary issues that continue to impact the Latinx community at large. The conference was organized by Stephanie Rivera Berruz (William Paterson University), Alexander Guerrero (Rutgers University), and Edgar Valdez (Seton Hall University). We attended the 2018 conference, and in what follows we offer our summary of the different presentations.

Erick Ramirez (Santa Clara) opened the conference with a discussion about ecological and ethical issues in virtual reality research. His paper aimed to raise awareness about the ethics behind such research given its recent growth. Ramirez argued that the environments created within the virtual world have the capacity of evoking responses out of its participants in nearly as effective ways as do real-world experiences. In light of that, he defends the claim that we should more carefully consider the ethical implications of virtual reality research specifically when individuals are repeatedly exposed to environments that alter their emotional states. Such exposure leaves one apt to changes within their character and dispositions. Comments were given by Javiera Perez-Gomez (University of Maryland).

Eduardo Duarte (Hofstra) followed with a paper entitled "The Question of Latin American Philosophy" in which he urges readers to understand philosophy as comprised of both the logical and the poetic. Duarte contrasts "originality"

in thought with "originary" thought, wherein originality refers inward, but originary thought is grounded in situated experience. He addressed the importance of engaging with and exploring the philosophical richness of texts and sources of knowledge that have historically been denied philosophical import. He stressed the concept of "feeling-thinking," which allows for the emergence of the subjective and culturally primordial experience of individuals to shine forth as well as challenges the basic framework one usually takes up when "doing philosophy." Comments were given by Stephanie Rivera Berruz.

As the first of three presenters on the panel "Why 'Structural Racism' Matters: Social Philosophy and Epistemology," César Cabezas (Columbia) discussed the paper "What Is Structural Racism?" Cabezas proposed that structural racism can be evinced by a systematic privileging of some groups over others within a given society. This idea runs in opposition to the notion that racism consists primarily of specific interpersonal interactions and that changing individual attitudes is what matters most when addressing racism. Cabezas argued that when race becomes a significant categorization tool for organizing human life, this results in the development of hierarchical relations among racialized groups and the racial domination of peoples.

Annette Martin (NYU) discussed her paper, "Race as a Cause of White Ignorance." Martin argues that three core causes—settlement, individualism, and no oppression—are grounded in epistemic states that create or promote racial domination and social hierarchies. Concerning settlement, Martin claims that preconceptions regarding land and people as "unconquered" and "savage" leads to instances of settlement and the ensuing racial and social structures. Individualism is a "colorblind" ideology which holds that a person's position in society, as well as their success and failures, are a personal responsibility, and so, under this ideology racial discrimination is nonsense. The final cause described "selective education" as an attempt to hide the "unsavory episodes" of American history leading to the idea of "no oppression," which describes a position of ignorance regarding the historical foundations of racism.

Eric Bayruns Garcia (CUNY) ended the panel discussion by defending the claim that power relations are just as capable of affecting the epistemic states of believers as others that concern traditional epistemologists. On this view, power relations are potentially even more pervasive of individuals' and groups' perceptual and environmental conditions in comparison to others such as barn facades because of their persistence over time. Garcia argues that power relations' embeddedness into history textbooks and intergenerational testimony can also affect one's internal states more heavily, which can cause believers to have implicit attitudes. Moreover, he shines a light on the notion that dominant groups will usually affirm false beliefs that bear the right relation to their interests as a dominant group, leaving minority groups vulnerable. The panel closed with comments and a Q&A session led by Carolina Flores (Rutgers).

Linda Alcoff (CUNY), one of three keynote speakers at the conference, concluded the first day with a presentation entitled “Cultural Racism and Revolutionary Nationalism.” According to Alcoff, racism is not solely directed towards groups and individuals; racism is also directed towards cultures. Recognizing and addressing cultural racism is key to decolonization and to appreciating the racism that Latinx individuals, in particular, face. On Alcoff’s view, the shift from biological racism to cultural racism is merely an attempt to lend legitimacy to continued racialized domination and oppression, and it is through revolutionary nationalism that cultural racism must be identified and addressed.

The following day, keynote speaker Natalie Cisneros (Seattle University) drew upon queer theory for her presentation, “Unapologetic and Unafraid: On Fear, Risk, and Resistance in Migration Politics,” during which she asked whether or not “coming out” as undocumented could be an act of resistance. Beginning with a discussion of the discourse surrounding undocumented individuals, Cisneros elucidated how the ideas of “risk and danger” have become conceptually tied to the bodies of the undocumented. Ultimately, Cisneros concluded that although coming out may be an effective act of resistance for some, it does involve a significant risk for the speaker, and as such, it is a viable means of resistance primarily for those who have sufficient means to shield themselves from the backlash.

Following a break for lunch, Noël Saenz (University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign) presented his paper “The Disciplining of Grounding,” expressing the need for a more disciplined approach to grounding. It discussed the principle of oneness, which claims that if z grounds x and z grounds y , then x is y . Although the talk explains grounding by differentiating between four kinds of claims—composites, normativity, biological, gender—the principle of oneness is focused primarily on entity grounding, as opposed to factual grounding. Saenz contrasted his work with related work by Louis deRosset and Eric T. Olson. “The Disciplining of Grounding” argues against the possibility of “Priority Monism,” which resonates with the monism found in Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Comments were given by Andrei Buckareff (Marist College).

Anthony Fernandez’s (Kent State) “A Truly Genetic Phenomenology: On the Possibility of Transcendental Contingency” challenges the phenomenological process provided by Husserl. The paper focuses on the “transcendental structure of selfhood” in terms of the self, self-ownership, the thoughts and feelings that belong to me, as well as the cognitive and bodily agency. The major concern was that phenomenology did not account for the subjectivity of specific empirical manifestations, such as childhood, and mental health. Criticism is aimed at the “cognitive and bodily agency” or the ability to distinguish between thoughts, feelings, and actions that originate in me as opposed to an external source. The proposed solution for the concern raised by Fernandez is the moving away from the transcendental to an ontological account of the human experience, which may include the naturalistic approach of psychology. Comments were presented by Alexander Guerrero (Rutgers).

The conference came to a close with keynote speaker J. L. A. Garcia’s (Boston College) presentation, “Social Construction: Breaking It Down.” He challenges the idea that race can be socially constructed. He is currently working out the distinction between accounts that address the social impact of race and arguments for the notion that race is a social *construction*. Garcia argues that while social causations can have a negative impact on the world, causations should be understood as distinct from social constructions.

During lunch, on the second day of the conference, the three of us, undergraduate students Danielle Guzman, Omar Moreno, and Lauren Viramontes (all from University of Texas at El Paso), had the opportunity to present posters detailing our individual research projects. (This opportunity was supported in part by an American Philosophical Association Small Grant award for the project “Beyond Borders: Bringing Latinx Undergraduates into Philosophy.”) Lauren and Danielle presented on topics pertaining to metaethics, and Omar presented on nineteenth-century German idealism. The undergraduate presenters provided the following remarks about their experiences of the conference:

The Latinx Conference enriched my undergraduate studies in several ways. The presentations allowed me to see how philosophical ideas are received and encouraged by the responses and questions of others, to the next stage of their development. The opportunity to present a poster was a unique experience that helped me think about the different ways to organize and present research and philosophical ideas. The conference was also an excellent opportunity to further develop my intrapersonal communication skills. Hence, the most rewarding part of participating in the poster presentations was interacting with the philosophers who graciously provided me with their perspectives on my efforts and engaged with my poster by asking questions about its content.

– Omar Moreno

The Latinx Philosophy Conference was an incredible experience. The atmosphere was very welcoming and it was wonderful to learn about emerging work on a diverse range of topics. Using a poster to present my research at the conference was a great way to organize and communicate my thoughts clearly. The feedback I received from philosophers has helped shape and better my project. Overall, the setting was very comfortable and provided a space to strengthen and enrich the existing community of diverse Latinx philosophers.

– Danielle Guzman

The Latinx Philosophy Conference provided me with the opportunity to attend presentations from philosophers working in a broad range of subfields, and at diverse points in their academic lives. I am left feeling grateful for the candid conversation

that developed during my poster presentation. Receiving valuable feedback, interspersed with lighthearted discussion, allowed for an experience that was both instructive and enjoyable. Engaging in a conversation about my research, instead of merely reading through my paper, forced me to articulate my ideas in ways that I might not have previously. It was certainly fulfilling to sit down with philosophers who I respect greatly, and really just “talk philosophy.»

– Lauren Viramontes

The plan for the 2019 Latinx Philosophy Conference is not yet set in detail, but if you have ideas or suggestions for the Latinx Philosophy Conference, either for this upcoming year or in future years, please send them to latinphilosophyconference@gmail.com.

SYLLABUS

UCSD PHIL 155: Mexican Philosophy

Spring 2018

T/Th 9:30–10:50 a.m., Solis 110

Prof. Manuel Vargas

OVERVIEW

Welcome! This is a course on Mexican philosophy, largely focused on notable figures, movements, and debates within the history of Mexican philosophy. Topics include the nature of atrocities and war; the ethics of bringing about moral revolutions; the social construction of agency; the relationship of race and culture; various approaches to identity; problems for the very idea of something being Mexican; and various other topics.

READINGS

- Required text: Sánchez and Sanchez, eds. *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century. Essential Readings* from this volume are marked as (S&S).
- Other readings available as pdf files on TritonEd. These are marked as (pdf).

EVALUATION

2 papers (2200 words each) (25% each = 50% total)

1 final exam (take-home; roughly equivalent to another paper) (25%)

Reading quizzes (pop; indeterminate number) (15%)

Participation (10%)

PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE

Subject to change, but if so, there will be advance warning. Read the articles prior to the date of the class meeting.

4/3	Intro. What is philosophy? What does one mean by Mexican Philosophy?
	Rec. background reading: Hurtado, G (2016) "Philosophy in Mexico" (pdf)
4/5	Sepúlveda, J (1544) <i>Democrates Alter</i> (selections) (pdf)
	Las Casas (1550) <i>In Defense of the Indians</i> (selections) (pdf)
4/10	Andújar, E (1997) "Las Casas and Sepúlveda" (pdf)
	Villoro, L (1989) "Sahagún or the Limits of the Discovery of the Other" (pdf)
4/12	Poem, Letter from Sor Filotea; Reply to Sor Filotea (start)
4/17	Sor Juana readings (continue)
4/19	Sierra, J (1910) "Discourse at the Inauguration of the National University" (S&S)
4/23 (MON)	Paper 1 Due, 5pm
4/24–6	Vasconcelos (1925) <i>Prologue to La Raza Cósmica</i> (pdf)
	Forbes, J (1973) <i>The Mestizo Concept</i> (pdf)
5/1–3	Ortega y Gasset (1914) <i>Meditations on the Quixote</i> (selections) (pdf)
5/8–10	Sánchez & Sanchez "Introduction", pp. xxi-xxxvii (S&S)
	Ramos, S (1941) "Twenty Years of Education in Mexico" (S&S)
	Ramos, S (1943) "The History of Philosophy in Mexico" (S&S)
5/15	Gaos & Larroyo (1940) "Two Ideas of Philosophy" (S&S)
5/17	Gaos, J (1942) "My Two Cents: "American" Philosophy" (S&S)
5/21 (MON)	Paper 2 Due, 5pm
5/22	Uranga, E (1951) "Essay on an Ontology of the Mexican" (S&S)
5/24	Revueltas, J (1958) "Possibilities and Limitations of the Mexican" (S&S)

- 5/29 Catellanos, R (1950) "On Feminine Culture" (S&S)
Hierro, G (1994) "Gender and Power" (pdf)
- 5/31 UCSD Mexican Philosophy Conference panel
- 6/5 Villegas, A (1960) "The Problem of Truth" (S&S)
- 6/7 Oliver, A (2014) "Seeking Latina Origins" (pdf)
- 6/12 Final

Shoni Rancher earned his PhD from Binghamton SUNY's SPEL program in 2014 and is currently an independent scholar living in Athens, GA. His publications include "Antigone: The Tragic Art of *Either/Or*" in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 16 (2014), and "Kierkegaard and the Tearful, Laughable Goal of Human Nature and Narrative Unity" in *Acta Kierkegaardiana VI*, vol. 6 (2013).

Grant J. Silva is assistant professor of philosophy at Marquette University and co-coordinator of the Race and Ethnic Studies Program.

Manuel Vargas is a professor of philosophy at the University of California, San Diego. Among other things, he is the author of *Building Better Beings: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (OUP 2013).

Lauren Viramontes will graduate in the spring of 2019 from the University of Texas at El Paso with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a minor in linguistics. Over the past two years, Lauren has worked with the Philosophy for Children in the Borderlands program, and it is through her involvement in this program that she discovered her passion for philosophy and for teaching.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Danielle Guzman is a senior at the University of Texas at El Paso. She has strong interests in metaethics, moral psychology, and social philosophy.

Omar Moreno is an El Paso, Texas, native and five-year veteran of the US Army Military Police Corps. He is currently completing his undergraduate coursework in philosophy at the University of Texas at El Paso.

José-Antonio Orosco is professor of philosophy at Oregon State University. His primary area of interest is in social and political philosophy, particularly democratic theory and global justice. He teaches classes in American philosophy and Latino/a and Latin American thought, with an emphasis on Mexican culture, history, and immigration to the United States. He is director of the Peace Studies program at OSU.